

## Romeo and Juliet In English Opens Century Season

Gounod's Opera Presented  
to a Record-Breaking  
Audience for the Benefit  
of the Red Cross War  
Relief Fund.

By Sylvester Rauling.  
THE Century Opera Company began its second season of opera in English at popular prices at the Century Opera House last night with a performance of Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet." In the audience were more notable persons and more fashionable people than the house has held since the Messrs. Milton and Sargent Aborn started the enterprise a year ago. In one box was Mayor

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and in another was Otto H. Kahn. Not every seat in the auditorium, the capacity of which has been enlarged by one thousand chairs, was occupied; but every seat, the management said, was sold. It was a gala night, a reflection, faint though it may have been, of the night at the Metropolitan Opera House that, two months hence, by the grace of God, the disposition of the Kaiser's army, and the continued neutrality of Italy in the great European war, shall launch the aristocratic operatic season.

Lovers of opera in the vernacular, of whom I am one, must not flatter themselves that the occasion marked a great accession to the cause. The receipts were for the benefit of the Red Cross War Relief Fund, of which Mrs. Elmer Hank is chairman, with a list of patronesses that would grace the society column of any newspaper. Fair ladies in evening gowns of white, or red, or blue, or gray, or green, pervaded the lobby, calling patrons into buying librettos and programmes and candles and—Heaven save the mark!—cigarettes and cocktails. Well, at least, the glasses were cocktail glasses, and the liquid they contained was red, and there was a cherry at the bottom of each glass. One rude—perhaps one should say unconventional—youth was overheard to reply to a dear lady who besought him to buy cigarettes that she ought not to lead him into temptation. Whereupon the dear lady, purple with indignation, said something under her breath that may not be recorded. Oh, yes! and after the performance there was a reception, at which one could meet or, at least, see the artists and partake of a buffet supper.

As to the performance of the opera! One swallow doesn't make a summer and with a keen recollection of the alternating hits and misses of last season it won't do to be too enthusiastic. Yet it may be said without qualification that it was meritorious and enjoyable. The ensemble was vastly better than last season's. The orchestra, slightly enlarged, was greatly improved. The chorus was more sonorous, the quality of the tenor voices especially attractive. The stage groupings were effective and there was naturalness and flexibility in the acting. The stage lighting, occasionally a nightmare, was artistic. For these reforms three men are to be credited: Jacques Cohn, the artistic director, who was a right-hand man to Mr. Hammerstein at his Manhattan and London Opera houses; Josiah Zuro, the chorus master, well known to supporters of Italian opera here, and Agide Jacchia, the conductor, whose ability was recognized by some of us a few years ago when he showed his paces at the Academy of Music, and who since has been connected with the Montreal and Boston Opera Companies.

Perhaps the importance of the Red Cross War Relief Fund Committee has caused mention in this review of the principal singers to be delayed so long. The title parts were taken by Lois Ewell and Orville Harrold, who established themselves in the roles last season. Miss Ewell, as Juliet, has added breadth to her conception, some significant bits of acting, and confidence in her singing of the character. Mr. Harrold's impersonation of Romeo remains one of the best on the contemporary operatic stage, but he must beware of his tendency to

affections both in singing and acting. Thomas Chalmers, as before, was an admirable Mercutio. Henry Weldon, a newcomer, made a pronounced hit as Friar Laurence. He has a big and a pleasing voice, and he uses it well. He sang too loudly last night, no doubt because the house was strange to him. Incidentally Mr. Jacchia may be advised to put the soft pedal on his orchestra and Mr. Zuro on his chorus. Mr. Weldon was honored by several recalls for himself, after Miss Ewell and Mr. Harrold for a long time had insisted on sharing them with him.

Elizabeth Campbell was a handsome Capulet, Frank Mansfield was Benvenuto, Gilbert Wilson was the Duke, John Mercer was Paris and George Everett was Gregorio. Algernon St. John Brenon, himself a music critic, has written an English libretto for the Messrs. Aborn's production of "Romeo and Juliet" that bears evidence of his scholarship and of his musical sense. But, as a dramatic critic remarked to me after last night's performance, "Not even Gounod and Brenon in conjunction can make one forget a certain William Shakespeare."

A word of praise for the clearness of pronunciation of the text by nearly all who took part in last night's performance is due. Lovers of opera in English are coming into their own. To-night "Carmen" will be sung, the proceeds again to be given to the Red Cross War Relief Fund. The surroundings will be similar to those of last night.

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